Season 12 - Program 6 - January 1959

THREE VIEWS OF THE THIRD AVENUE EL

THE THIRD AVENUE EL: A film by Kit Davidson. Distribution: Contemporary Films. Script: Helena Sand. (10 minutes)

THE WONDER RING: A film by Stan Brakhage. Distribution: Cinema 16

ECHO OF AN ERA: Produced and directed by Henry Freeman. Camera: Robert Galbraith. Script: Arnold Bloom. Music: David Amram. Shown by arrangement with George K. Arthur. (10 minutes)

A trio of films offers contrasting views of a beloved memento of New York's past: THE WONDER RING, an intensely subjective impression of an "El" ride; ECHO OF AN ERA, the early days of the "El" as seen in charming engravings and photographs; THIRD AVENUE EL, a documentary in the realist tradition.

The lights will go on for a moment at the end of Part 1 of THE GENERAL: this is not an intermission; please remain in your seats

THE GENERAL U.S., 1927 (78 minutes)

Written and directed by Buster Keaton and Clyde Bruckman. Camera: Dev Jennings & Bert Haines. Starring Buster Keaton, Marion Mack, Glen Cavender, Jim Farley. Distribution: Museum of Modern Art Film Library.

Joseph Francis Keaton was born in 1896 and started work at the age of 3 1/2 in one of the roughest acts in vaudeville; as a member of "The Three Keatons" he became a veteran trouper before he was in his teens. In 1917 he was engaged by Joseph M. Schenck at $40 per week to appear in two-reel comedies and went on to become one of Metro's biggest stars; a Keaton feature cost about $200,000 to make and reliably grossed $2 millions.

One of the great clowns of film, "Keaton moves in the mechanized world of today like the inhabitant of another planet. Inventions and contrivances like railroad engines seem insuperably animate to him, in the same measure as human beings become impersonal. Without friends or relatives, he is generally incapable of associating with his fellow-beings on a 'human' basis, but mechanical devices, though often inimical to him, are, on the other hand, the only 'beings' which can 'understand' him. They are the real co-stars in his films.. He always wins in the end: not, like

Chaplin, by romantically escaping from the world of machinery into a realm of human freedom, but, on the contrary, by fatalistically throwing his humanity into the whirlpool of mechanical forces.." (Museum of Modern Art)

"No other comedian could do as much with a dead pan. He used his great, sad, motionless face to suggest various related things: a one track mind near the track's end of insanity; how dead a human being can get and still be alive; an awe-inspiring sort of patience and power to endure. Everything that he was and did bore out his rigid face and played laughs against it.

"Keaton worked strictly for laughs, but his work came from so far inside a curious and original spirit that he achieved a great deal besides.. He was the only major comedian who kept sentiment entirely out of his work and he brought pure physical comedy to its greatest heights. Beneath his lack of emotion he was also sardonic; deep below that, giving a disturbing tension and grandeur to the foolishness, for those who sensed it, there was a freezing whisper not of pathos but of melancholia.

"Because 'dry' comedy is so much more rare and odd than 'dry' wit, there are people who never much cared for Keaton. Those who do, cannot care mildly."
James Agee, LIFE

Mr. George Pratt of George Eastman House, Rochester, New York, notes that "the theft of the 'General' did occur at Big Shanty in April, 1852; but there were not 11 but 22 Union soldiers involved. When the 'General" began to run out of fuel, the pursued took to the woods, where they were captured. Later, eight were executed as spies in Atlanta, six were exchanged, and eight escaped. I cannot protest against Keaton's freedom with this material; it is comedy's license to do as it pleases. And so there would be no murmur from me if you should discover that in this entire 27-page pamphlet, there is not a single mention of Annabelle Lee."

TWO INTERESTING ARTICLES CONCERNING BUSTER KEATON
appear in Volume 1, Number 1 of the FILM QUARTERLY on sale (at discount) in lobby.

THE NEXT 2 SPECIAL EVENTS WILL BE SHOWN BOTH TUESDAY AND WEDNESDAY
The "1958 Creative Film Award Winners" Special Event will be held on Tuesday, January 20 (7:30 PM) and on Wednesday, January 21 (7:15 and 9:30 PM).
The "Tokyo Twilight" Special Event will be held on Tuesday, February 3 (7:30 PM) and on Wednesday, February 4 (please note: 7:00 and 9:30 PM).

DUE TO RUNNING TIME OF "TOKYO TWILIGHT",
the Wednesday (February 4th) screening will start at 7:00 (NOT 7:15) and 9:30 PM.
Please make arrangements to come on time.

Rages and Outrages

By ARCHER WINSTEN

This season's unique experience has already happened as far as I'm concerned at Cinema 16. For many years now, since the very beginning of that organization, I have been noting the extraordinary width, depth, breadth, variety and what-not of the taste that guides and chooses the pictures shown to those audiences. Such a practice virtually guarantees that each program will have items of such poles-apart contrast that individuals cannot like both extremes. Also, there will be extremes of enjoyment and its opposite, revulsion.

A week ago Sunday I went to the Beekman Theater to catch two films from Great Britain. First came a British Broadcasting Company-TV 30-minute short titled "Poverty, Chastity and Obedience." It took the audience to the Anglican Community of the Resurrection in Mirfield, England, and interviewed the monks there on subjects mentioned in the title. There was no suggestion of camera trickery or lively intercutting to break up long conversations. The camera looked steadily at the face of the man speaking, mirroring his slightest changes of expression as he struggled to explain the attitude of his order.

It goes without saying that this reviewer is not on the verge of joining a monastery. Such matters should be normally interesting but hardly fascinating. And yet, they proved utterly absorbing, for this was what they were talking about:

Poverty: this was a rule of life in which they tried to unclutter their lives, discarding the pile of possessions, the property and its obligations, the automobile, the TV set, the radio, the thousand things that modern man thinks he needs to be happy and is told incessantly that he must have if he is not to be underprivileged. They asked themselves if the insane multiplication of possessions and desires of the modern world are conducive to great happiness. They asked themselves if the far richer, much more heavily endowed Americans were so much happier. They had their simple rooms, their simple household tasks, the simple toil in the field of their farm. Their faces looked less worried than do many of ours.

Chastity: they spoke of this as a matter of faith. They believed in God and they loved him. Therefore, rather than spread one's energy and love among many, they preferred to concentrate on the one, greater, spiritual love. It was only sensible, if one did believe.

* * *

Obedience: they wondered what kind of freedom a person had if he were under the heel of conflicting desires. They felt that in subjecting themselves to the discipline of their spiritual chief, they were winning a greater and more precious freedom than people in the outer world could know, freedom from the tyrannies of their own desires and indecisions.

Again, as they spoke, there was little indication that they had found the struggle too hard, though their faces did show signs of battle and victory.

What seemed especially notable was the contrast with the teachings of psychoanalysis with its emphasis on complete release of all inhibition as the beginning of wisdom and cure. And yet, here were people in whom the stoic solution and its consequent shrinking of desire failed to result in the usual concomitant effect of a shrunken personality. On the contrary, there did seem to be a kind of personal richness and refinement, wholly visible in these beautifully photographed and studied faces.

* * *

It struck me very powerfully that whether or not I believed, whether or not the arguments were complete, this picture was touching basic questions of contemporary life in a way that not one out of 100 contemporary films attempts. Without attempting any blandishment of entertainment, it spoke directly to the mind and conscience of an intelligent adult. It was fascinating.

When it ended I thought I would like to clap to show my feeling. Someone else started it, and many joined in, as you know, a rarity among movie audiences. It was a strange and distant and beautiful world, and this picture opened a big clear window on it, showing the emotions in the faces.

NEW YORK POST, MONDAY, DECEMBER 1, 1958

The New York Times
SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 2, 1958.

TOP-LEVEL FANS

They Still Are Hotly Interested in Films

By BOSLEY CROWTHER

WHAT with the vital statistics telling us almost every month that the public is going less and less to movies and that disaster looms for the film industry, it is cheering and just a bit befuddling to read stories such as those published in this section last week about the demonstrations of audience interest at recent Mexico City and Brussels festivals.

In Mexico City, the mobs of people jammed into the National Auditorium to see prize-winning films from several countries (at 32 cents a head) hooted and howled at some entries and fervently greeted others, to the point where on a couple of occasions, the police had to be called.

Over in Brussels, at about the same time, a well-bred audience that had come to hear a jury report on the all-time best films, after looking at screenings of a dozen candidates, whipped up an unholy ruckus because the jurymen ducked the job of rating the films. We gather the particular indignation of the 2,000 in the Grand Auditorium and those squeezed into the Little Auditorium on the Brussels fair grounds was at the failure of the jury to mention "Citizen Kane." But the point is that 2,500 persons were publicly passionate about films.

The other day, we were talking to Paul Rotha, British critic and veteran producer of films, who was passing through on a trip from Australia. He said the interest of people out there in the artistry and lore of motion pictures is growing by leaps and bounds. He noted a remarkable increase in the formation of film societies and the eagerness of the discriminating to see more of the classics and unusual product of the screen.

This sort of interest is evident all over. Cinema 16, which is the largest and most active film society hereabouts, is having one of the most successful seasons in the twelve years of its existence. It expanded recently to form an audience in Manhasset, L. I., and was oversubscribed for the facilities it had in the Cinema Theatre there even before its series began.

Fertile Fields

There are continuing indications of an avid interest in film culture that extends beyond the substance of the individual picture to embrace the history, tradition and lore of films. Furthermore, this area of interest embraces the fields of experiment that are being tilled apart from the commercial theatres and thus the manifold potentials of the medium. More and more people—not just longhairs—are becoming high-level movie fans.

Now, it's true the buying power of this kind of interest is nowhere near enough to sustain even the present decreased momentum of the commercial film industry. The number of fans on this level are not enough to keep the movies alive.

But certainly the chance for stimulating more excitement in the culture of films, and thereby encouraging moviegoing, is shown clearly by the evidence here. An area for serious cultivation, not greedy exploitation, is revealed. The subscribers to Cinema 16 number countless people who frankly admit they have been brought back to selective moviegoing by the pictures they see and the enlightenment they get from the programs of the film society.

Perhaps if all commercial film purveyors had as much interest and respect for their product as these people have, and did a lot of things that would show it, the statistics would improve.

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